Hypochondriasis
Hydrophobia
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An Inaugural Essay on Hypochondriasis

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The Elder physicians were not sparing, and often unhappy in their use of terms in Medicine. Of this we have sufficient proof, if we but open their nosological books. Technical words meet our eyes in every direction, and if they do not confound us; at least puzzle our wits in attempting to ascertain their precise meaning, and original application.

Hypochondriasis is that term, which was employed by ancient nosologists to denote an erroneous state of mind produced as they conceived, by a derangement in the functions of the liver, or some other viscus of the hypochondriac region of the Abdomen. It is, however abundantly proven, that hypochondriasis is not derived from a diseased liver, or any other viscus. The Term therefore is incorrect, and has not been applied with strict propriety. Custom, nevertheless, demands its use.

As this form of mental derangement appears most evident in an erroneous perception, and judgement of things relating to the person, and circumstances of the patient, Dr. Rush proposes the substitution of the term Tension Mania, for hypochondriasis. — Various epithets are applied to this disease in common conversation. The hypo. spleen, vapours, low spirits &c. mean the same with hypochondriasis in its different grades.

In what class and order among diseases, are we to rank the subject of this essay? As the author has been more in the habit of directing his attention to the symptoms and phenomena of diseases, than their characteristic distinctions, it will be sufficient to observe that Dr. Cullen pursuing the plan of Linnaeus, places it in his class neuroses, and order adynamia. His character of it is "Dyspepsia with languor, sadness, and fear, from inadequate causes, in a melancholic temperament."

Persons of the nervous and hepatic predispositions are most subject to Hypochondriasis. The arterial predisposition is often united with the others. Hypochondriasis bears a resemblance to Hysteria, but there are certain prominent features by which they may be easily distinguished. The bloodvessels are more affected in Hysteria than Hypochondriasis. The nervous system in the latter, is frequently in a state of torpor, in the former, great mobility prevails. Hysteria appears in paroxysms, attended occasionally with delirium. It is not so with the other disease. Hysteria is alleviated by cold, Hypochondriasis by warmth. They often, however, alternate with each other, and blend their symptoms together.

that hypochondriasis combines with Hysteria, we might prove by a history of facts. Some hypochondriacs are at one moment dull, and sad, at another gay and vivacious to an extreme. They are among the most boisterous laughers, and are addicted to great merriment and mischief. These are convulsive efforts, and are to be explained by the supposition that they are borrowed from Hysteria.

From Melancholy it is not easy to separate Hypochondriasis. The mind in Melancholy is evidently most affected. Dyspepsia a trait in the character of the former is lost in the latter. The nerves and muscles are more *rigid in the latter than the former. The bowels in Melancholy are torpid, and cannot be moved without the administration of powerful cathartics. The distress of the patient here, is not derived from the apprehensions of personal maladies alone, but is in part produced by erroneous views of matters not relating to himself. — Persons advanced in life are more subject to Hypochondriasis & Melancholy than the young.

Causes.

The Remote causes of this disease operate, on the body, or the mind, or on both at the same time

* By rigid I mean a state of immobility, and want of power.

Among the first are all debilitating occupations of a sedentary kind; fatigue, irregular diet, hunger, watchings, unwholesome food, chronic fevers, &c.

The second variety comprehends all the excesses of the passions and emotions, joy, love, ambition, grief shame disappointment, anger, vexation, religious distress intense study &c.

The third variety, or those causes which operate on the mind, and body at the same time; are all perplexing employments, where the mind is unduly hurried and the body fatigued as professional practice, teaching of school &c. The different forms of the venereal disease by inducing debility, and at the same time exciting emotions of shame, and sorrow in the mind have laid the foundation of hypochondriasis. Impotence, is likewise a source of this disease.

Symptoms.

These are very various. Indigestion flatulency, costiveness diarrhea, an excessive secretion of bile, a dry skin, an increased flow of urine, shiny stools, a deficiency of appetite, preternatural appetite, cholic, a turned abdomen tinnitus aurium, throbbing of the temples, indistinct

vision, palpitations of the heart, a burnings of the hands and feet, a sallow complexion, downcast countenance &c.

The Mind is as variously affected as the body. It is languid and inactive, and can seldom be employed in thinking on any subject but that of personal distress. The imagination is in search of doleful images "with a wing that never tires". Almost every disease lends a share of symptoms in forming hypochondriacs. They are, however, only counterfeits. — As consumption is the most frequent & mortal disease it is not to be wondered at, that it should stand foremost among the chimeras of the hypochondriac's brain. If a cough happens to trouble him, he has an abscess in his lungs beyond all doubt; if his face be somewhat flushed, his fears immediately create a hectic, and should his hands, and feet be a little warmer than usual, nothing can convince him that the dreadful malady has not begun. †

Should the hypochondriac have been cured by a strumpet and attacked by the pox; notwithstanding its poison has long since been eradicated from his system, he is in constant fear of losing his palate, or the inside of his nose, by the inroads of the resuscitated destemper.

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† If an hypochondriac believes he has the consumption, it is a good proof that he is wrong. This disease is almost invariably attended with false & delusive hopes in its commencement.

His imagination conjures up to his view the loss of reputation and of friends, and predicts ruin and misery, as his attendants through the remainder of his life.

Again:- he believes that his heart is dilated into an aneurism, or has concreted a polypus; if peradventure through sheer debility, it palpitates, or beats with a little irregularity. And thus, in turns, he has a stone in his bladder, an abscess in his liver, and a tape worm in his belly. His mind is agitated by a thousand fancies. He is firmly convinced, at one time, that his body is transformed into a plant, and that he needs the wholesome showers of heaven to make him grow. — Or it may be, that he thinks himself changed into a teapot. Under this belief, he is in an awful situation if he happen to be too roughly handled, and he shivers at the idea of being broken to peices. — Probably he has conceived himself ~~[illegible]~~ with child; — or what is much worse; he even persuades himself that he is dying; with no more ado, he suffers the pangs of dissolution, and lies a lifeless corpse. Nothing under these circumstances will quick-him into life, but some application like the actual cautery. This powerful stimulant cannot fail of inflaming his feelings to the most sensible belief that he has yet to die.

These are not all of the mental sufferings of the hypochondriac. He is sometimes in a state of despair. Here we involuntarily exclaim "Was poor humanity." This state of the mind is induced by a full persuasion, that he cannot be saved, and that eternal misery awaits him in another world. I once heard an aged gentleman who was in this situation, exclaim with great feeling, "had I the tongue of an angel I could not tell my misery. The spiritual distress of the hypochondriac is produced by wrong views of the character of the Deity, and of his own sins. Every little neglect in his religious exercises in former life recoils upon him, with apprehensions that it was a most fatal omission of his duty. The Deity loses his character of mercy in the mind of the unhappy man and brandishes the sword of vengeance against his fancied delinquency. — His intellects are entire and his reasonings correct on all topics, which do not relate to himself —

Hypochondriasis if not cured often terminates in Melancholy, mania, and in disorders of the liver. Suicide has been sometimes resorted to by hypochondriacs.

Remedies.

The remedies for hypochondriasis may be divided into two kinds. 1st, such as act on the body, or 2d such as operate on the minds.

The first kind are as follows,

1st Bloodletting. The pulse very often assumes an inflammatory tone, which ought to be immediately reduced. It gives astonishing relief to the most urgent symptoms

2d Purges. These are indicated by the presence of bile, and to remove costiveness, a very prominent symptom of the disease.

3 Tonics. These are often necessary —

4 Sudorifics are advantageously employed to give relief. Copious sweating is mostly injurious.

5 Blisters. Their operation being attended with pain, diverts the mind from its supposititious distresses.

6 Opiates are not to be overlooked in the treatment of hypochondriasis.

7 A Salivation. Mercury brings up the rear of most prescriptions; and though last is not least efficacious in obstinate diseases. — Cordial and and warm drinks may often be given.

Exercise. It should in the first instance be gentle. Walking, sailing, and riding on horseback ought to be tried successively. The latter is a most noble remedy. The journeys of the hypochondriac should be long, pursued through a pleasant country, and never solitary. He should make a business of his travels. It is of importance that cold and moist weather be avoided. Green the poet, who understood the nature of spleen, gives many excellent precepts for alleviating it.

"In rainy days, keep double guard,
Or spleen will surely be too hard,
Which like those fish by sailors met,
Thy highest when their wings are wet."

Agriculture, and Horticulture, are employments, which by combining exercise of body with an easy and agreable attention of the mind, have restored health, and vigour to many hypochondriacs.

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of the chace, and of shooting, are excellent remedies to invigorate the flaccid muscles of the body. It is of great importance that all disagreeable associations in the patient's mind be destroyed

2 Of Remedies which act on the mind.

The langnor and inactivity of mind so common in hypochondriasis make it necessary that the most powerful incentives be employed to rouse it. — Agreeable conversation enlivens the hypochondriac and obliterates his mental ~~surmises~~ sufferings. Let him seek the company of women of wit and virtue and cautiously avoid being idle or solitary. Bustle and business are antidotes to Hypochondriasis. They call forth the whole vigor of the faculties, and bend the mind to a proper point of exertion

The perusal of books of wit and taste are well calculated to beguile the time of the hypochondriac. Hudibras. Smollet, Cervantes, Pindar &c. may be read for this purpose.

Music. This remedy is often extremely serviceable. The tunes, and instruments, should be varied according to the state of the mind

If it be disposed to much sadness, and melancholy & very sprightly air, will do great violence to it. Ought the patient ever to be contradicted in his obstenate fancies? A Physician should never treat his disease as trivial; but on the Contrary seem convinced of its reality; and thus humour his fears, and whims with tenderness and delicacy. Contradiction will generally dispose the patient to believe that his complaints have not recieved due attention from his physician, and will tend to make him still more unhappy.

Ridicule is attended with advantage in those cases where, the patient persevere in his absurd notions respecting his identity. It operates by exciting emotions of contempt, anger, and indignation.

Theatrical entertainments are an antidote to Spleen.

If Spleen fogs rise at close of day,
I clear my evening with a play,
Or to some concert take my way,
The company, the shine of lights,
The scenes of humour, musics flights,
adjust, and set the soul to rights.

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The amusing games of chess, cards, and backgammon, are well calculated to divert the mind from its melancholy musings.

If the unhappy hypochondriac have spiritual astrafses, let him consult his priest, and bible.

Finis.

Postscript

Brevity has been studied in this essay, to save the time of the learned professor, to whom the task may devolve to peruse it—

J. Reynolds